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ABSTRACT

This evaluation examines the administrative history, staffing levels and content of school district guidance and counseling activities. Case studies were made in a 50 percent random sample of the Eugene, Oregon school district's 45 elementary schools. Eight hundred teachers, parents and students were interviewed. All school plans were reviewed. Five-year staffing patterns and staff changes were studied. For 15 days all district staff with guidance and counseling responsibilities recorded characteristics of guidance and counseling contacts. Schools with and without counselors were studied to estimate differences in who receives services and what is provided. Results showed systematic differences in the level and kind of services provided secondary and elementary students. Approximately one-third of the schools studied had stable programs. Schools with stable programs provided a broader range of services and distributed them in a more equitable manner. An organization chart of the Oregon Department of Education guidance and counseling operations for 1980-81 and tables of evaluation results are included. (Author/JAC)

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The Evaluation of an Oregon School District's Guidance & Counseling Activities

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ABSTRACT OF

AN EVALUATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICT

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PROGRAMS:

PROCEDURES AND RESULTS

This evaluation examines the administrative history, staffing levels and content of school district guidance and counseling activities. Case studies were made in a 50 percent random sample of a district's 45 elementary schools. Eight hundred teachers, parents and students were interviewed. All school plans were reviewed. Five year staffing patterns and staff changes were studied. All district staff with guidance and counseling responsibilities recorded characteristics of guidance and counseling contacts for fifteen days. Schools with and without counselors were studied to estimate differences in who receives services and what is provided. Results show systematic differences in the level and kind of services provided secondary and elementary students. Approximately one-third of the schools studied had stable programs. Schools with stable programs provided a broader range of services and distributed them in a more equitable manner.

INTRODUCTION

The provision of guidance and counseling services in American schools increased substantially since 1960. This paper briefly recounts the history of guidance and counseling in American educational practice and the methods used by a school district to evaluate its guidance and counseling activities. Procedural and conceptual difficulties in doing the evaluation are discussed. The administrative history, staffing, and content of the district's guidance and counseling are summarized in turn.

The belief that guidance and counseling should be provided young people grew steadily since 1880. Mass immigration, urbanization and rapid industrial growth were accompanied by increasing emphasis upon vocational education, testing and moral guidance. In 1909, a counselor-teacher was appointed for each school in Boston. In 1911, the Cincinnati public schools established a guidance and counseling program.

In 1929 New York became the first state to have full-time guidance personnel in its State Department of Education. The development of elementary and secondary counseling proceeded differently. The intertwined growth between guidance and counseling, and career and vocational education led to greater use of counselors in high schools. Job placement and vocational education were especially emphasized during the depression of the 1930's.

By 1953 there were 7,000 secondary counselors (Jones and Miller, 1954) and approximately 700 elementary counselors (Myrick, 1978). The passage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 initiated substantial increases in the numbers of counselors. In the interests of national defense and in reaction to perceived technological advances by the Russians, extensive monies

were spent for the training of secondary school counselors and the establishment of guidance and counseling programs and research institutes. This increased federal support accompanied educational thinking such as Conant's influential book, The American High School Today, (Conant, 1959) which recommended that there should be one full-time counselor for every 250 high school students.

The number of elementary school counselors in the United States doubled from 1967 to 1971, increasing from 3,800 to 7,900 (Van Hoose and Kurtz, 1970). Secondary school counselors also increased throughout the 1960's and 1970's as did the numbers of federal and state staff assigned to guidance and counseling. This growth was accompanied by increases in the number of states establishing counselor certification requirements and the numbers of institutions training counselors.

The historical development of guidance and counseling, especially its intertwining with vocational education and career counseling, resulted in an emphasis on secondary school counseling. This national pattern is reflected in state regulations, such as in Oregon, which set required counselor-student ratios for secondary schools but not for elementary schools. By the late 1970's there were approximately 50,000 school counselors of whom about 10,000 were elementary counselors (Shertzer and Stone, 1981; p.51). (For a detailed history of guidance and counseling see Herr, 1979; and Shertzer and Stone, 1981).

In 1979 the Eugene, Oregon district had 18,000 pupils, 1100 teachers, and 45 schools. The Eugene, Oregon school board requested the district's admi-

ministration to evaluate guidance and counseling activities in the district's schools. Questions asked by school board members and district staff centered around three major topics: What do counselors do, what goes on in schools with and without counselors, and can you have a program without a counselor?

An evaluation feasibility assessment, including interviews with 30 district staff, and reviews of work done by other school districts analyzed options available. Evaluators were hampered by a lack of theory. The literature on the evaluation of guidance and counseling is generally exhortative or prescriptive stating how and what should be evaluated rather than describing accomplished evaluations (Mowder and Prasse, 1981; Atkinson et al. 1979; Gladstein, 1979; and Leviton, 1977). Evaluation of school district programs has only recently been done by research and evaluation work groups (See O'Neal, 1982; Norris and Wheeler, 1981; and Wehmeyer, 1981).

Conceptual difficulties in delimiting what guidance and counseling consisted of also hampered evaluation design. The professional literature reviewed included multiple definitions of "guidance and counseling." Unreliable data sources within the district; vague and conflicting definitions of "guidance", "counselor", and "counseling"; unclear and overlapping staff assignments; an amorphous program organization; and a lack of comparable studies in other districts contributed to differences of opinion on appropriate design elements and data collection methods.

Identification of staff and staff years assigned to guidance and counseling was complicated by error rates of five to ten percent in personnel office records, and the frequent assignment of counseling responsibilities to

staff with job titles other than counselor. For example, personnel office records included persons no longer assigned such responsibilities.

Eugene evaluators adopted a multiple-independent data base strategy combined with elements from a discrepancy model (Provus, 1971) and a C.I.P.P. approach (Stufflebeam et al, 1971). Five data bases were created: Case studies were made in a 50 percent random sample of the district's elementary schools including interviewing 200 district teachers; staffing patterns for the previous five years and rates of staff change for each school were compiled; the administrative history of guidance and counseling was studied; approximately 500 randomly selected parents and students were contacted; and 12,600 cards recording characteristics of guidance and counseling activities were collected from 65 district staff who were asked to fill out a card for every guidance and counseling activity they were involved in for 15 days. The five data bases generated about 400,000 numbers.

REVIEW OF FINDINGS ABOUT ADMINISTRATION OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING

In keeping with national trends, the district's guidance and counseling operations expanded from senior high schools in the 1930's to junior high and elementary schools in the 1960's.

An administrative reorganization in 1974 shifted counselor supervision to school principals, while district level supervision continued through "curriculum coordinators." A 1974 district staffing plan adopted as the size of the counseling staff began to decline was blamed by counselors for competition and changes in job assignments. Although comments in school plans indicated that

as a result of the staffing plan, schools eliminated counselor positions in favor of other specialists, such as physical education, music or art teachers; it is not clear whether these actions were a result of the plan or of preferences which the staffing plan allowed expression.

Counselors interviewed during the study expressed dissatisfaction with district administrative policies and procedures which they said interfered with their ability to carry out their job description. Competition with other staff for assignments, variations in job responsibilities, lack of a district coordinator, and being viewed with skepticism were other sources of dissatisfaction expressed by counselors when interviewed.

State of Oregon regulations, adopted in 1976 and revised in 1981, require guidance and counseling programs. A 1979 state review of district operations cited the weakness of district and school evaluation components as its only major concern although other concerns mentioned were the lack of district-level coordination, lack of service to some students due to declines in staff size and unfair methods of hiring and retaining counselors. The state report described administration regulations as well-planned and satisfactory if implemented.

Enactment in 1977 of Public Law 94-142 dealing with "Special Education" had major effects on guidance and counseling activities. Counselors and special education staff work with the same students. All special education staff, who worked in schools without counselors, when interviewed reported they did work a counselor would have done.

The 1981 revisions of state regulations increased requirements for identification and attention to individual students needs, and for evaluation of

programs. Evidence of compliance with state regulations by the school and district is now required in Oregon.

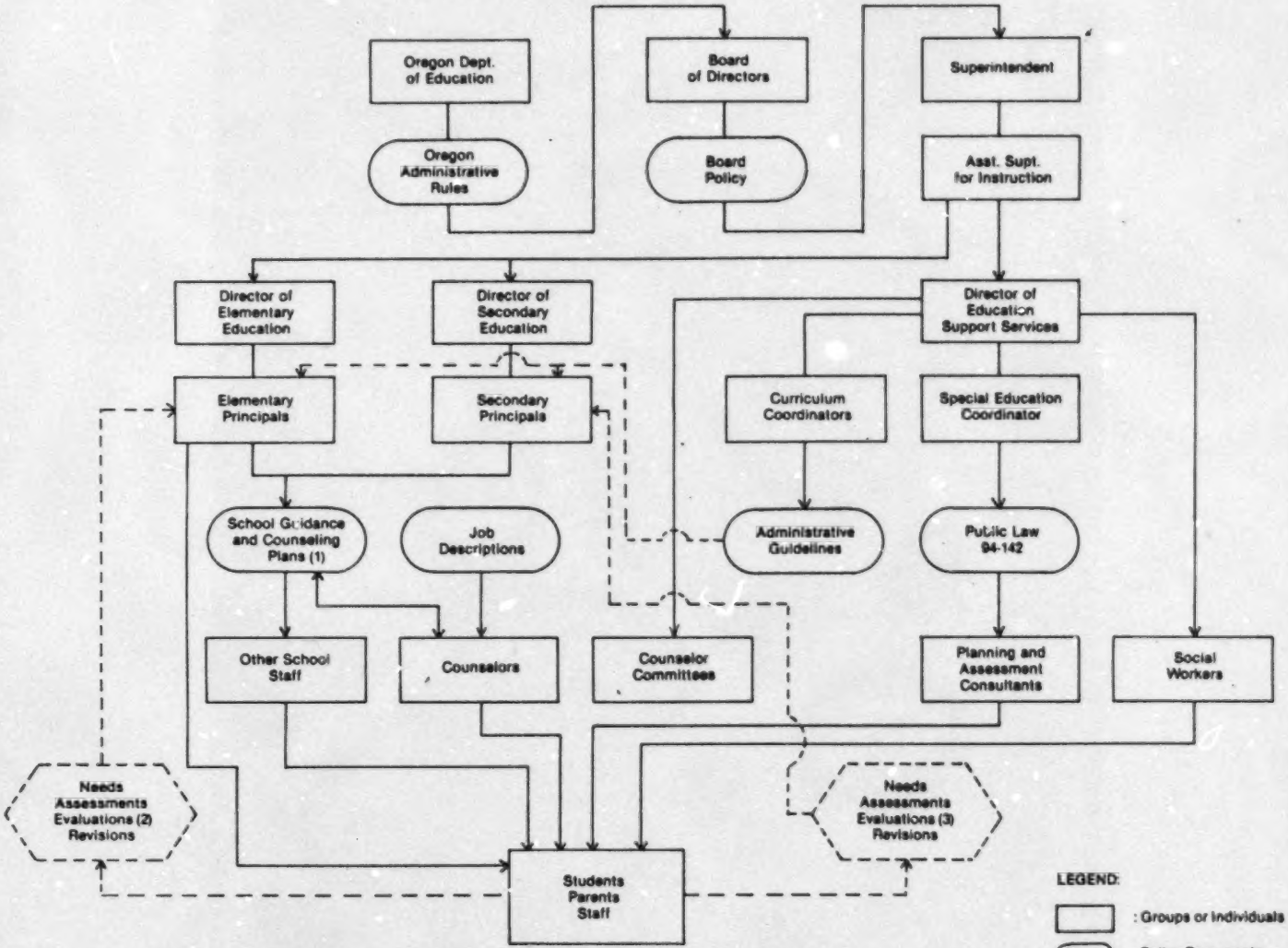
The school district's table of organization is shown as Figure 1. Under this hybrid system of centralized and decentralized planning and decision-making, all staff assignments, supervision and evaluation, and all planning and content evaluation were the responsibility of principals. Administrative reorganizations delegated district staff coordination to two different positions in the past three years.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

Planning in the form of needs assessments and school plan development was assigned to schools and was implemented to varying degrees. Planning for a district-wide needs assessment was completed in 1980, but the assessment was not conducted because administrators and counselors believed that the data would either not be useful or not be used.

All Oregon schools are required to have school plans. The district's school plans were read and analyzed using checklists to describe their characteristics. School plans were based on the district's program guides which included goals, objectives, activities, required staff competencies and evaluation activities. Many school plans contained the required program goals, objectives. Some plans lacked one or more of the above required elements. Student-based goals and objectives were not developed. Schedules and specific staff assignments were rarely made. Evaluation components, where noted, were nearly always vague.

ORGANIZATION OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING OPERATIONS · 1980-81



1) Varied incorporation of district guidelines, board policy and ODE regulations (see School Plans chapter)

2) 12 of 31 plans provide for needs assessments. 12 provide for evaluation. Only 1 provides for incorporation of the needs assessments into the school plans.

3) 6 of 12 secondary plans mentioned needs assessment. 3 of 12 mentioned evaluation. None mentioned revision.

Coordination in schools was done by counselors, and to a lesser degree by principals; at the district level the Director of Educational Support Services continued monthly guidance and counseling staff meetings begun by former administrators. However, the Director's written assignment for guidance and counseling did not extend beyond convening the meetings. Guidance and counseling was administratively treated as a support service. There were no curriculum philosophy statements for the area, and no teacher subject matter councils, nor was guidance and counseling included in the district's instructional time allocations. The district had not revised its 1979 guidelines which provided for a now non-existent position, a "curriculum specialist" to review annual "discrepancy reports" and proposed plans for improvement. Discrepancy reports submitted twice, in 1977 and 1978, on guidance and counseling varied in depth and enthusiasm. No reports were submitted since 1978.

Evaluators concluded that guidance and counseling is difficult to administer because it is neither totally instructional nor totally a support service. The review of how it has been administered shows its dual nature and unclear boundaries. This dual nature is reflected in perceptions within schools of the counselor role. For example, counselors, when interviewed said they were perceived to be part teacher and part administrator.

Programs related to guidance and counseling - social studies, career education and health - were administered differently in that they had either a central office coordinator or subject area councils or both, and in that one central office administrator participated in staff evaluations with principals.

An inflexible central office record-keeping system and non-computerized files hindered measurement of the effectiveness of special education and counseling staff work. For example the records of the district's social workers stated how many students they worked with. The records of the school psychologists state their student load. However, the records would have to be manually searched to determine which students are receiving attention from both a social worker and a school psychologist.

REVIEW OF STAFFING FINDINGS

District counseling staff included counselors and persons with ten other job titles. The number of full-time equivalent positions assigned to guidance and counseling decreased out of proportion to enrollment decreases between 1975 and 1980. Elementary enrollment decreased eight percent while counseling staff decreased 33 percent. The number of schools without counselors increased from 10 percent to 42 percent. Size of student body and enrollment decreases were not highly correlated with loss of counselor assignments.

A review of the number and kinds of guidance and counseling personnel changes during 1974-1980 indicates approximately one-third of the elementary schools had a stable program, where "stable" means the same full-time staff person was present for five years. Fourteen percent of the schools accounted for two-thirds of all changes.

Junior high staff levels increased by ten percent while enrollment dropped by nineteen percent. The senior high staff levels decreased by six percent while enrollment dropped eight percent. The number of students per

counselor in schools with counselors increased by 5 percent between 1975 and 1980. The ratio would be even lower if the nearly 4000 students in schools with no assigned counselor time were included. The elementary ratio is ten percent higher than the state of Oregon's, 669 versus 613; the junior high ratio is 30 percent higher, 398, versus 307; and the senior high ratio is ten percent higher, 280, versus 250. The state ratios decreased over time while the district's have increased.

REVIEW OF FINDINGS ABOUT CONTENT OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING ACTIVITIES

The analysis of the 12,600 cards showed that counseling staff reported spending nearly 50 percent of their time on counseling, coordination and consultation duties. Nearly 20 percent was taken by assigned duties such as monitoring, public relations and information recording. Guidance teaching accounted for 8 percent of district counseling time, decreasing from 13 percent for elementary staff to six percent at the junior high level and three percent at the senior high level. The number of counselors reporting guidance teaching decreased from elementary to senior high.

Monitoring activities were more time-consuming and reported by more staff at the elementary level than in junior and senior high schools. Monitoring duties were defined to include bus, hall, or playground duty. Elementary principals reported the highest levels, between 13 and 100 percent of monitoring activities. Nearly all elementary staff reported monitoring compared with 83 percent of junior high counselors and 60 percent of senior high

counselors. Differences in monitoring, coordination, and guidance teaching time and differences in time spent with students, teachers and parents suggests differences in the perception of guidance and counseling, program organization and objectives.

Counselor responsibilities are diverse. Counselors often connect one activity or client group to another. This diversity has contributed to confusion about their role. The typical full-time counselor worked as administrator, teacher, consultant, clerk, and monitor, in addition to the traditional role of advisor-counselor, which took less than 20 percent of their time during the survey

Sixty-two persons with seven different job titles from 45 schools eventually provided information on 12,634 activities or conferences. The data from the cards were transferred directly to computer tapes by a service hired specifically for the task. These cards were analyzed at the terminal, using field renumbering utility programs on the county's IBM mainframe. Hierarchial collapsing procedures were devised to recombine fields.

For example, each person could use up to five of 28 descriptors to describe the contact. Including the 28 single descriptors, a total of 663 different configurations of activities were reported. 2,134 of the 12,634 activities used two descriptors, and 51 used five descriptors. The 663 combinations of the original 28 activity descriptors were eventually reduced to 37 combinations. Fifty-one percent, 335, of the combinations were reported only once and constituted two percent of the total events reported.

Reviewers initially considered deleting these multiple code, low- frequency

reports. A review of the relative frequencies of the activity descriptors, a comparison of their frequency of occurrence singly and in combination, the proportion of time (duration) for which each counselor used one, two, three, four or five descriptors, and interviews with counselors who had highly idiosyncratic reporting patterns indicated that deletion of low-frequency activities and those using four or five descriptors would significantly affect the overall data profile. Deletion of longer, but low-frequency activities would have reduced some counselors' profiles by more than 10 percent and would have eliminated nearly all activities more than one hour in length a category which consumed significant amounts of counselor time.

Similarly, the card used to record contacts contained eight descriptors to record the roles of people in the activity. Sixty-two combinations of the eight original role descriptors were reported and reduced to 18 combinations. In carrying out the reductions, reviewers considered the factors mentioned above and, in addition, considered possible interpretations of the data given the directions which accompanied the contact cards, questions asked by participants, the organization of the activities in the counselor job description, the overall data profiles of which given activity descriptors were a part, and notes made by participants on the cards.

Counselors, Parents and Students

With the help of the counselor committee advising the evaluation, one questionnaire for each group: elementary students, secondary students, and parents, was developed and pre-tested. A random sample of households with at least one fourth to twelfth grade student was selected from the 11,600 listed in the district's enrollment files. Using a four-attempt telephone contact

procedure, interviewers talked with one parent and one student in each household. Researchers eventually interviewed 94 percent of the 500 persons selected; in those households with more than one student, one student was randomly selected to be interviewed. Parents and students were interviewed separately whenever possible. Approximately 45 percent of the secondary students and thirty-five percent of the parents were interviewed by phone.

Fourth, fifth and sixth grade elementary students were interviewed, most at their schools, to find out which school staff students knew, which ones students talked with, and the conversation topics. If the student's school employed a counselor, then students were asked about family-counselor contacts.

Both elementary and secondary students indicated a high degree of knowledge of counselors and satisfaction with counselor conferences except those involving test results and attendance. For example, elementary students were able to identify who the counselor was in their schools. Counselors were perceived to be accessible and helpful. Parents indicated a level of satisfaction, 75 to 85 percent, similar to that found in other district parent surveys. A comparison of parent and student interviews from the same household showed that the parents and students provided conflicting information in 10-20 percent of the cases.

Counseling staff spent about half their time with students. Parent involvement varied with level, dropping from eleven percent at the elementary level to six percent in senior high schools. Teacher time with counselors also dropped as grade level increased, from 25 to 18 to 10 percent between elementary and junior high schools.

Figure 2 shows the number of guidance and counseling activities reported during the 15 days of data collection by the elementary staff and also shows the kind of staff who reported. Each circle represents a separate person. The regular full time elementary counselors reported seven times more activities than non-counselors.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

Substantial differences in the activities reported at the elementary level by counselors and non-counselors suggests differences in perceptions as well as programs. Elementary counselors reported ten times the coordination activities and more counseling, consultation, information recording and placements than non-counselors. Counselors' rate of contact with parents and teachers was twice as high as non-counselors; non-counselors saw students more often than counselors. Non-counselors saw seven percent more fourth to sixth grade students than primary students. These relationships held even when counselor data were controlled for high reporters.

Distribution of Staff Contacts

Table 1 shows that guidance and counseling services were unevenly distributed among grades. Secondary students received twice as many services during the study period as elementary students.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

TABLE 1

SHOWS THE GRADE OF STUDENTS AND THE NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES THAT OCCURRED WITH STUDENTS IN EACH GRADE

Grade	Percent of Activities	Number of Activities
1	5.7	383
2	5.6	380
3	6.3	429
4	5.8	392
5	5.5	373
6	5.9	400
7	10.2	687
8	11.0	744
9	13.4	904
10	8.7	587
11	10.2	687
12	11.8	796
	100.1	6762

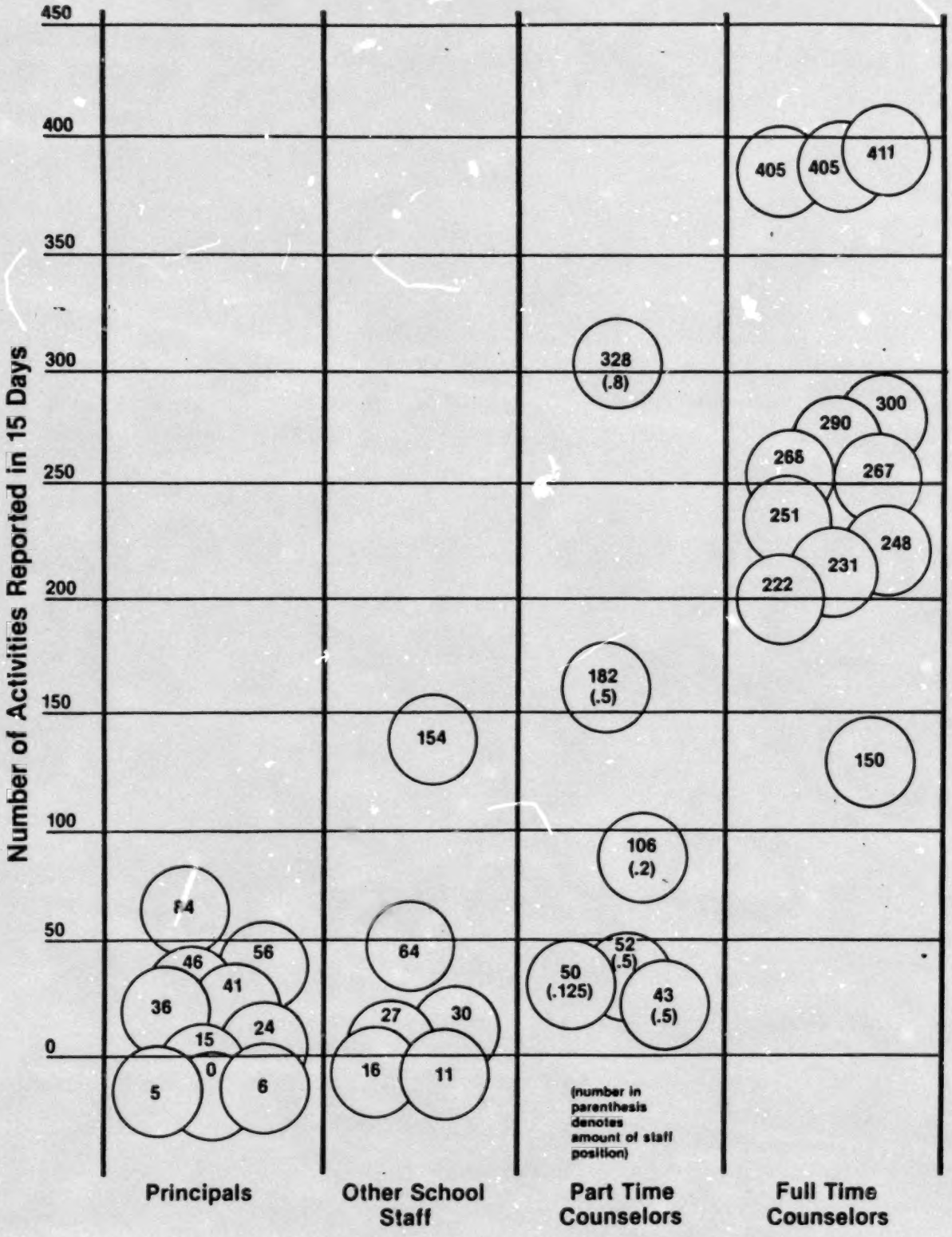


Figure 2

Reported Guidance and Counseling Activities

Each Circle Shows the Number of Guidance and Counseling Activities Reported by Each Principal, Other School Staff, and Part and Full Time Counselors in the Study.

These data show the existence of systematic differences between secondary and elementary counseling operations. These data also show that schools with counselors provided more services and a wider range of services than schools without counselors.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The inequitable distribution of guidance and counseling activities observed reflects national trends emphasizing secondary schools. The greater variability among elementary schools in the level and kind of staffing are in keeping with the weaker legal and programmatic emphasis placed on services to elementary students. Cutbacks in the last five years in counselor positions occurred primarily in elementary schools. The cutbacks did not result in lower staff workloads as special education staff workloads increased.

Epistemologically, it is difficult to say if the district had a "program" in its elementary schools. Many customary indicators were non-existent. (See Barber, 1982) No single chain of command existed which provided for the centralized hiring and supervision of staff, program content was neither standardized across schools nor integrated into curriculum planning. Administrative regulations were not updated and supervision of staff in schools without counselors did not control for schools without programs. On the other hand, some program elements existed. All schools did have plans, a good set of administrative guidelines were written, one-third of the elementary schools had stable programs, counselors were known to students, and a guidance and counseling sup-

port services council was created and a senior-level administrator assigned to convene its meetings.

The dual nature of guidance and counseling roles, part instructional-part support services, contributes to the problematical location of guidance and counseling programs in a table of organization and difficulties in its administration.

Given the similarity of national trends with the history of the district, it is reasonable to speculate that research and evaluation work groups will encounter similar situations when evaluating other guidance and counseling programs.

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